The ring of the telephone wakes me up. My back aches as though it had been pummeled with a shovel. The telephone rings once again and I jolt up, only to hit my head on the bottom of a hard surface. Once the pain subsides I can clearly see what happened. I must have been exhausted as all hell last night. I passed out on my living room floor and just banged my head into the coffee table. The phone rings once more, and as soon I have my bearings I answer it.

"Rob where are you? We were supposed to meet for breakfast."

"Lucy, is that you? Shit what time is it? Ugh, goddammit my head."

"It's eleven. Were you out... drinking last night?" Lucy asks. My silence seems to provide her with the answer. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, I've just got a lot on my mind. Look, I'll take you out to dinner tonight. Right now I just want to be alone," I say and I hang up the phone before she has a chance to respond.

My head slams down onto the coffee table. My eyes feel bloodshot and my face is dampened with what seems to be sweat. I'd like to say that I forgot what I had done last night but not even alcohol could poison those memories and moments. Today is destined to be a wasted day, as is tomorrow. No matter what happens in the next two days they will be purged from my memory. There seems to be no better time than to embrace hedonism.

Throughout the day I have run through hobbies and joys that I had long forgotten. I read books that lay forlorn and dusty. I watched movies that once made me laugh and that once made me cry. I replaced the brakes on my rusty bicycle and went on the first ride I had had in years. Though the day sludged on, it was much more bearable than the former. I can't say that I was disappointed, but I can't say that I was truly relieved either.

Once again the sun gives up on another day. In the dim twilight there is a ring at my doorbell. I open the door and am beset by surprise. Lucy stands at the threshold of

my house. I am unsure of my own expressions. My only clue is her look of concern, but it may just be the residue from our conversation earlier.

"Are you okay?" she asks me. "I've been trying to get a hold of you all day, but you wouldn't answer your phone."

"I've been out. All day," I respond. I take my windbreaker off of the coat hanger, already annoyed about the questions to follow.

"But your cellphone…"

"I left it at home."

"Please tell me what's going on, you've never acted like this before."

"I've never been in this situation before," I say bluntly and head out the door. "Who's going to drive?"

I step down my porch stairs, barely hearing her response. At the final step I have returned to the atmosphere of hostility. Something pulses through my mind. I run up to my trash can and kick it into the street. Tattered remains of whatever the garbage men neglected to take spill all over the road. I take a deep breath and bring the barrel back in.

"What's going on?" Lucy asks.

"You're not an idiot," I say as I approach Lucy's car. "Don't make me connect the dots for you."

We sit silently in the car, riding through an air of discomfort. She looks to me every

once in a while and prepares to ask a question. I return a look that answers the question before it can be asked. I eventually grow tired of painting the obvious and close my eyes in an attempt to get some fragments of rest. The bumps and stirs of the road prevent me from disappearing from the world.

"You've got to talk about this," Lucy says. "It's really bothering you."

"And what will talking do? Will it stop them from being at each other's throats? Will it make all of the bad things go away? Will it help that little girl?"

"What little girl?" Lucy asks.

She almost stops the car in surprise. A horn blares in the background before a car barely swerves around us. I hope that that's enough for Lucy to forget the question, but my hopes vanish as soon as the car returns to its full speed. She doesn't say another word. She wants an answer. She's expecting it. I think about choosing my words carefully, but decide to just blurt out whatever thoughts and emotions cross my mind.

As the cliched old tale comes to a close, she doesn't move. She barely does anything beyond blinking her eyes and keeping her breaths in time. I anxiously wait for a response, any response whatsoever but none comes. She's as lost as I am. This feels like an I-told-you-so kind of moment and I would take some satisfaction in it if I didn't so badly want her to have an answer of some sort. I knew that she didn't and now her mind must be going through the same hoops that mine has been for so long.

"So what did you do?" she finally says when we come to a red light.

"I called child protective services. They'll send someone down Monday."

"Well then, there's nothing else you can do."

"Thank you for that little nugget of advice! I had no idea," I snap.

Lucy seems taken aback, and looks at me like an apology is supposed to fill the air. I'd gladly oblige if I truly felt sorry. I don't feel much of anything right now. A gentle rain begins to pat on the window of the car. I close my eyes and the world around me becomes nothing but the rain.

The dinner goes nowhere. Very few words are spoken between us. Most of the food lay untouched. Wine does dull the awkwardness a little. After an hour of staring at our food we agree to call it a night and just go home.

The car ride home manages to be more painfully silent than the dinner now that there is no conversation between old friends and relatives in the background or the tines of forks scraping the last morsels off of plates. Not even the sprinkling rain reduces the silence. At the very least it gives me something to watch as most of the roads seem abandoned this time of night.

I arrive home and leave Lucy to her own endeavors. Once inside my house I hear her drive off. I'm still not sorry for snapping, for being vague, for trying to taper the harsh brutality of the situation I find myself in but I do wish that it would have gone differently. I know it's a pipe dream and a faint glimmer of hope that she would have the magic answer to make all of the pain go away. Perhaps it's just youthful affection, or perhaps it's just youthful stupidity.

I lay down on the couch and stare at the ceiling in my darkened house. I may as well be asleep. Either way my mind runs wild with fantasies throwing logic to the wind just to give me waking nightmares and other restless dreams.

The next morning the soft sprinkle had turned into a raging downpour. I think about going for another walk anyway, despite—or perhaps because of—the chance that it may make my body sicker than my demeanor. Anything for a change in tone. I do manage to think better of it and try to distract myself with mere totems of enjoyment. The hours swim and then sink in a grizzly haze. Each is more persistent than the last and the attempts at amusement grow less and less effective. I can

only play so many games of checkers with myself before I have to do something else.

Familiar harshness rides atop the sounds of drizzle. They're back to arguing once again and this time I have no escape besides shutting my window. As I approach the sill, a mood of difference invades the trite old story. This argument is one-sided. No wait, it's not an argument. I open my ears and actually let the fierceness into my mind for once.

"So, your mother's meals are too good for you, you little fucker?" I hear and a splash echoes the distilled hatred.

I look. Goddammit I look. I knew what I was about to see. I knew that I would never be able to forget about it. I knew all that I had to know. So why did I look? I see that girl face-down in a puddle of mud. Her father stands over her. I can only see one of his eyes from this angle, but it's all I need to truly be horrified. I don't see anger. I don't see sanguine malevolence. I see disaffection.

"Well why don't you just eat mud. Go on Cassie, eat it. Or are you too good for that too?"

"Please Daddy, I'm sorry," the little girl says, trying to pull herself out of the mud. The man puts his hand on her back and pushes her back down into the mud.

"If you're so damn sorry then you'll eat it. We're not going back inside until you eat it."

For the first time I am sick enough to look away. For the first time I am able to shut the world off completely. I no longer hear anything, not even the tapping of rain on the window. I no longer see anything, not even my cold dark living room. My mind is blank. My body is numb. If I could still hope I would hope for a million things to just end it all. As it stands I can't do much of anything right now.